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THE CED AND VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE*

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During the past year the Committee for Economic Development published its fourth statement on American agriculture. In the report the CED singled out vocational agriculture as one of the primary causes of the so-called "farm problem." The solution to this problem, according to the CED, is the massive movement of resources, especially people, out of agriculture and an end to farm-oriented education.

It may be appropriate to describe briefly the composition and purpose of the Committee for Economic Development. According to its policy statement CED is composed of 200 businessmen and educators and is financed by industry and business. Fifty trustees from the total group comprise the research and policy committee which develops the policy statements for use as guides to public and business policy; for texts in college economics and political science courses; and for consideration by editors, columnists and commentators.

As a means for getting their views before the public there can be no quarrel with this procedure. Those assuming this function must likewise assume responsibility for factual material and fair presentation.

In a specific proposal the CED position is stated as follows: "If the farm labor force were to be, five years hence, no more than two-thirds as large as its present size of approximately five and one-half millions, the program would involve moving off the farm about two million of the farm labor force, plus a number equal to a large part of new entrants who would otherwise join the farm labor force in the five years." Another statement of the same basic policy reads: "The common characteristics shared by these problems is that, as a result of changes in economy, the labor and capital employed in the industry (agriculture) cannot all con-



tinue to earn, by producing goods for sale in a free market, as much income as they formerly earned, or as much as they could earn if employed in some other use; that is — the industry is using too many resources."

In regard to this statement Mr. Fred C. Foy, Chairman of the Board of the Koppers Company, made the following memorandum of comment, reservation or dissent: "I agree with all this paragraph except the italicized (underlined) statement. It is true that in some industries or areas of the economy, labor and capital cannot earn as much income as they could if employed in some other use, but who is CED to say that in this situation 'too many resources' are being used. In a free economy the owner of the labor or capital must be free to decide how he wishes to use them. It will always be true that some capital will earn less than others in the market place, but their earning less

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does not necessarily mean that they are being wasted or should be withdrawn."

There are a number of other proposals in the report, all supplementary to the basic one of getting two million additional workers out of agriculture into the cities. Some of these proposals are adjustment of prices, (and in this case the committee recommends the withdrawal of all price supports over a period of years) a cropland adjustment program, a temporary soil bank, and the one that we are most directly and vitally interested in, the elimination or partial elimination of vocational agricultural education in farming areas. Referring to the vocational agricultural education program the committee states: "Here, in our opinion is the main key to agricultural adjustment—getting a large number of people out of agriculture before they are committed to it as a career." To try to prove its point the committee makes the following statement: "This means that in many states where farming is strongest, vocational education tends to perpetuate the farm problem of too many people in agriculture by holding out extraordinary opportunities to train for farming as a vocation." I am sure that most of you are familiar with the table in the CED report purporting to show the large percentage of vocational funds spent on agricultural education. If you have not already done so I would suggest that you get the actual data for your state and then compare it to the data in the CED report. Apparently the data concerning expenditure for vocational education in agriculture as given by the CED is not accurate or it is not up-to-date and has been further distorted by eliminating the expenditure for one service, namely Home Economics. I will refer to just three states, those whose representatives testified before the House Agricultural Committee in August. The CED report indicates that in Minnesota 52.4% of vocational funds are spent for agricultural education, when actually for the most recent year the correct

figure is 34.4%. In North Carolina the CED report shows 74% spent for agriculture, when actually it is 30% for the most recent year. For Georgia the CED figure is 73%, the actual figure 32%. Using the pattern employed by CED, in figuring expenditures for vocational agriculture, we find the figures are distorted to try to prove their point, by elimination of funds spent on Home Economics education. For instance, in Minnesota the CED figures show 52.4% for agricultural education if Home Economics is not considered. If we are to use the CED formula for the most recent year the actual figure is 47%, not 52.4%. For North Carolina the CED figure given in their chart is 74.4% when actually following their formula it is 39.2%. The point has been raised that if the CED used out of date or incorrect data to draw conclusions regarding agricultural education, how factual is the other information in this report?

The testimony given by the AVA representatives before the House Agriculture Committee tended to establish the fact that not too much money is being spent for education in agriculture, but rather maybe not enough has been spent in the past for other types of vocational education. In this testimony to the House Agriculture Committee it was pointed out that the number of vocational agriculture high school graduates does not begin to fill the need for farm replacements and this situation in general obtains in most of the states of the Central Region. We cannot find any data, charts or tables in the CED report to substantiate the assumption that our education system is "holding out extraordinary opportunities to train for farming as a vocation." The testimony given shows that in many cases there has been a substantial increase in funds for business education, for trade and industrial education, for technician programs, for area vocational schools, and others. In Minnesota the rather rapid establishment of area vocational schools throughout the state is making training for many vocations available to a significantly larger number of our rural population students.

One other item regarding the table in the CED report concerning vocational education and income from farming, is the reference to the per cent of personal income from farming. The data given by CED is that 9.2% of personal income in the State of Minnesota is from farming. The implication is that the expenditure for vocational education should be on the basis of distribution of personal income. If we are to accept

this philosophy it would mean that the CED feels a milk truck driver drawing a salary of \$12,000 a year would have over twice as much vocational education as a farmer with a labor income of \$5,000. This in spite of the fact the farmer may be operating a business with a gross income of close to \$30,000 and an investment of \$60,000 and has all the management responsibility and know-how that a business of this size requires. Is the contribution to the economy of the community measured only in terms of "personal income?"

It would seem the CED quite largely nullifies its own argument that elimination of funds for vocational education in agriculture will solve the agriculture adjustment problem by getting a large number out of agriculture when it says "It is obvious that the extent to which we may be successful in using this key will depend upon the impression the farm youth gets when he looks at the non-farm economy with an eye to uprooting himself permanently from farming. If employment prospects off the farm are not attractive young people deciding whether to commit themselves to a career on the farm or in the non-farm economy can be expected to decide in large numbers that the long term prospects are best in farming."

Do people become committed to agriculture as a career and stay on the farm because, as the CED report states, vocational agriculture holds out "extraordinary opportunities" to train for farming as a vocation or because of some other factor? The CED report charts the net migration from farms for the years 1950 to 1958 showing that in 1952 1,990,000 people migrated from farms. Two years later in 1954 the figure is 25,000. Again, two years later the figure is 1,100,000. Check the correlation between business activity and employment in cities in the years cited. With this variation in net farm migration, maybe the problem is not keeping too many people on the farm through "extraordinary opportunities" to train for farming. Certainly the "extraordinary opportunities" do not vary that much from year to year.

An illustration of how unrealistic the proposals in the CED report are is their belief that by declaring a five year moratorium on entry into farming the problem will quite largely be solved. To do this, of course, would mean the wrecking of an educational program, not only for young people but for the adults on the farm as well. Also, it would seem that the committee is over-

looking the fact that each year a considerable number of capable young people go into farming because they desire to follow that occupation as their vocation. The CED proposal appears to depart from the American concept that each individual has a right to determine his vocation. The CED overlooks the fact that during a five year period a significant number of people on large, well equipped, well managed farms will retire, die or leave the farm for some other reason. Would the CED have us believe that these farms would or should stand idle?

Is the answer to the farm problem actually one of less education? Is it reasonable to eliminate vocational agriculture as recommended by the CED, when what is needed is the continued expansion of an educational program for farm people that gives emphasis to leadership and sound management.

There are a number of other questions that the CED could have raised but did not. Vocational educators know that you do not solve one problem by creating three new problems. What of employment in industry of 2 million additional farm people over a period of five years? If these 2 million are to be moved to industrial centers would it not seem reasonable in light of the present situation that at least 3 million additional workers will be seeking jobs? There are large numbers of married women in our cities who are presently employed in business and industry. What of the 4 million presently unemployed in the cities? With the non-farm labor force increasing by one and one-fourth million people a year and industry apparently not being able to absorb this number, what will be the effect of adding several million more?

Another question raised by the CED report concerns the displacement of people from rural communities now servicing farmers. If one-third of our present farmers are to be moved to the city in a five year period there will be a tremendous displacement of others from rural communities as well. Possibly a number almost equal to the number of displaced farmers. What would happen when these people are added to the present unemployed labor force? How readily will people move from a community where they are established to an entirely new community and way of life?

A further question has to do with the philosophy that all resources used in agriculture must be used to the limit. The

month this CED report was received the steel industry was operating at 74% of capacity. If the CED recommendations were to be applied to this industry, the unemployed steel workers should be moved from where they are now to another location and 26% of the steel making capacity of the country should be dismantled. Some members of the committee do not accept this as they indicate in a dissent statement that this policy of displacement of people and dismantling of facilities should apply to agriculture but not to other segments of the economy.

Is the CED fair in being critical of agriculture for not operating at maximum capacity? In the *St. Paul Dispatch* of November 27, 1962, a summary of business conditions by the U. S. Commerce Department dealt primarily with the profit squeeze in industry. According to the report, in 1948 profits were 21.3% of corporate output. By 1962 this had shrunk to 15.7%. However, the part of the article most pertinent was this: The Commerce Department reported that in every year since 1957 the American economy has been operating "well below capacity" even during expansion phases of the business cycles. In other words, agriculture is not the only phase of the American economy that has been operating at less than capacity.

The objective of higher income for farm people with a free market is commendable and desirable. The plan for more educational opportunities for rural youth and rural people receives our wholehearted support. As agricultural educators we must completely disagree with the CED proposal for reaching this objective.

Will the CED program be adopted as public policy? Maybe it was never intended to be, but adopted or not we are going to have to contend with it for a long time. With this report in the hands of college professors, on the shelves of libraries, available to editors, commentators and a handy reference for writers, correct or not, it will be quoted and referred to. As an example of this, just last week the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago quoted the CED regarding expenditure for vocational education and "personal income," that too much money is being spent on vocational agriculture, etc.

Is this in the best interest of America? Should anything be done regarding this report and its specific reference to vocational agriculture education? That is for the pro-

fession to decide. Each of us has a responsibility for being familiar with the report and all its implications and to make the true facts known. Vocational agriculture over the past 40 years has had to fight for everything we have ever had. We have had to fight for a place in the school program, in the curriculum, for funds, and for students. We are going to have to fight and fight hard for any gains we make. That should not discourage us. That is one of the reasons we have a strong, vigorous, worthwhile educational program for farm people.

The CED report points out the urgent need for a vigorous, continuing program of information on vocational agriculture, its aims and accomplishments at the local, state and national levels. Experience has demonstrated that given a good program and informed people, something like the CED report does not make too much impression. We do have the obligation of keeping 10,000 boards of education where vocational agriculture is taught informed of our objectives and accomplishments. Also school administrators, parents of students and the public must be informed.

Dr. LaVern Freeh, Director of agricultural short courses at the University of Minnesota, has pointed out that American agriculture is an expanding, changing industry, offering more career opportunities than ever before. Those who view agriculture as a declining field with limited opportunities are either viewing only segments of it or are unable to distinguish between change and decline. To understand modern agriculture and the career opportunities offered one needs to understand some changes which have taken place — changes which have been overlooked by many and misunderstood by many more.

Time was when agriculture meant farming and ranching and little else, and for centuries most of the population of the world was engaged in farming and, in some parts of the world, it still is. But, progress in the form of science and technology, hard work, and initiative brought tremendous changes in the American agricultural industry. Things that used to be done on the farm by the farmer moved off the farm — things such as processing, manufacturing, distribution, marketing and advertising. But, while these activities moved off the farm, they did not for the most part move out of the agricultural industry. Vocational agriculture, FFA and a farm background are valuable assets and a good foundation for an agricultural career.